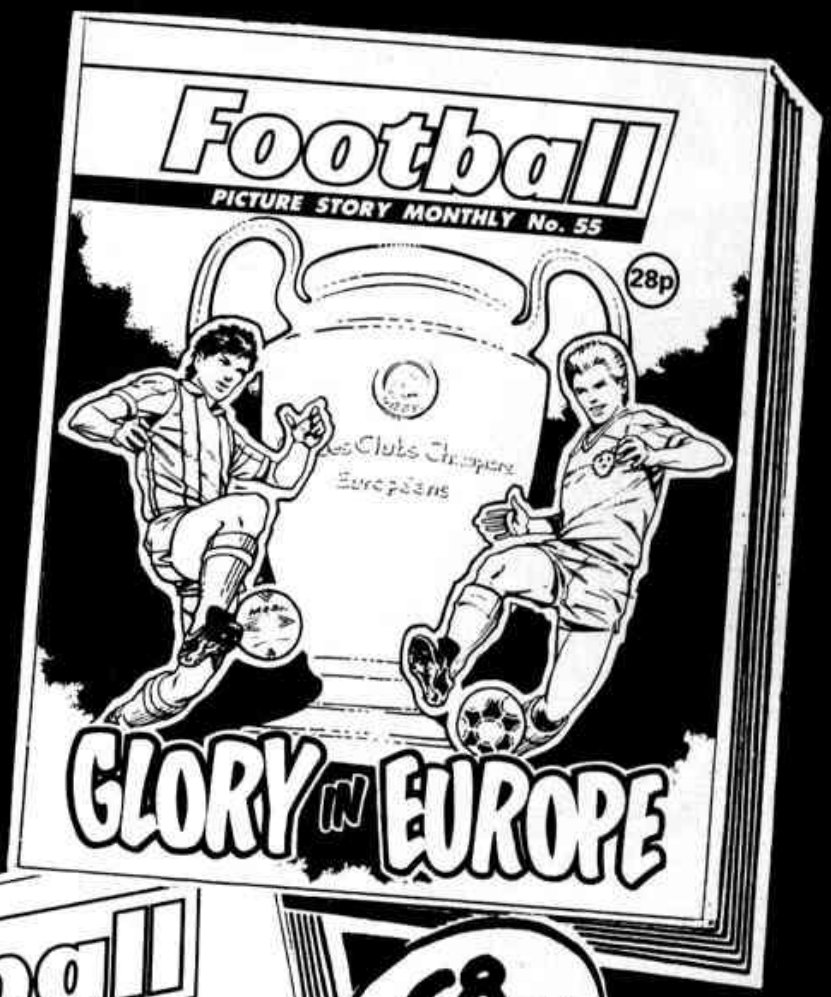
STARBLAZER

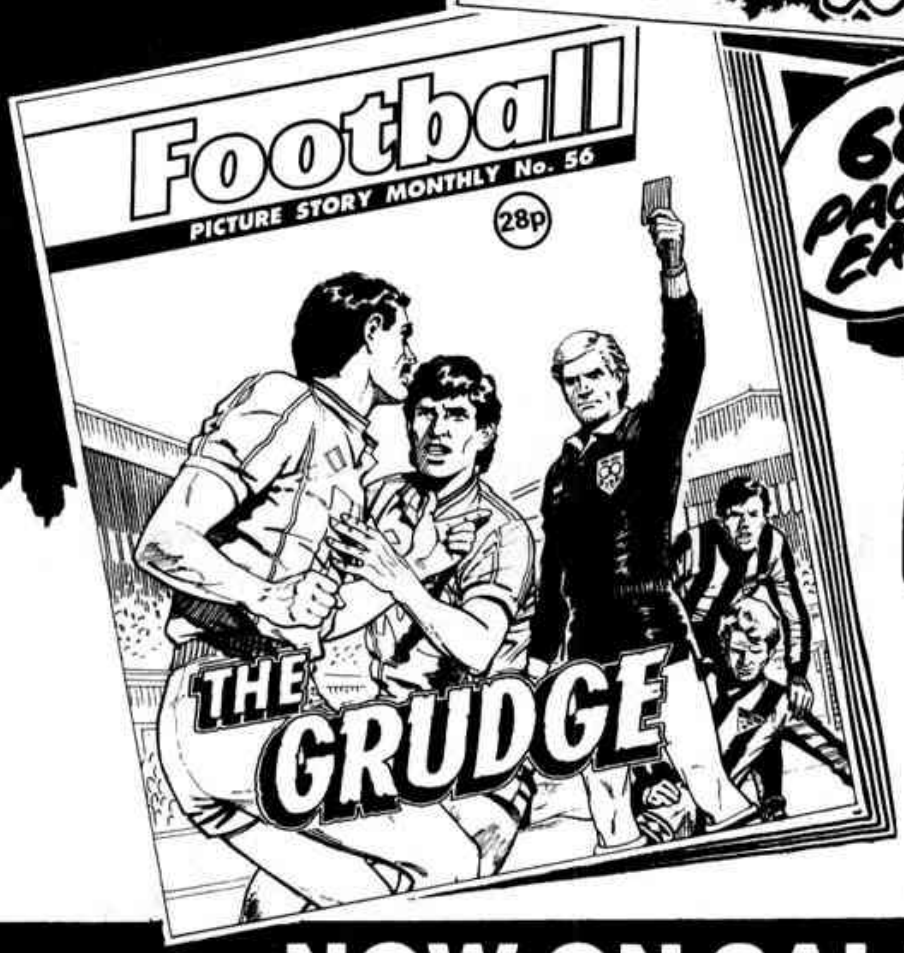
FANTASY FICTION IN PICTURES No. 224

28p

RUNE WAR

IF YOU'RE A FOOTBALL FAN, YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO MISS THESE!



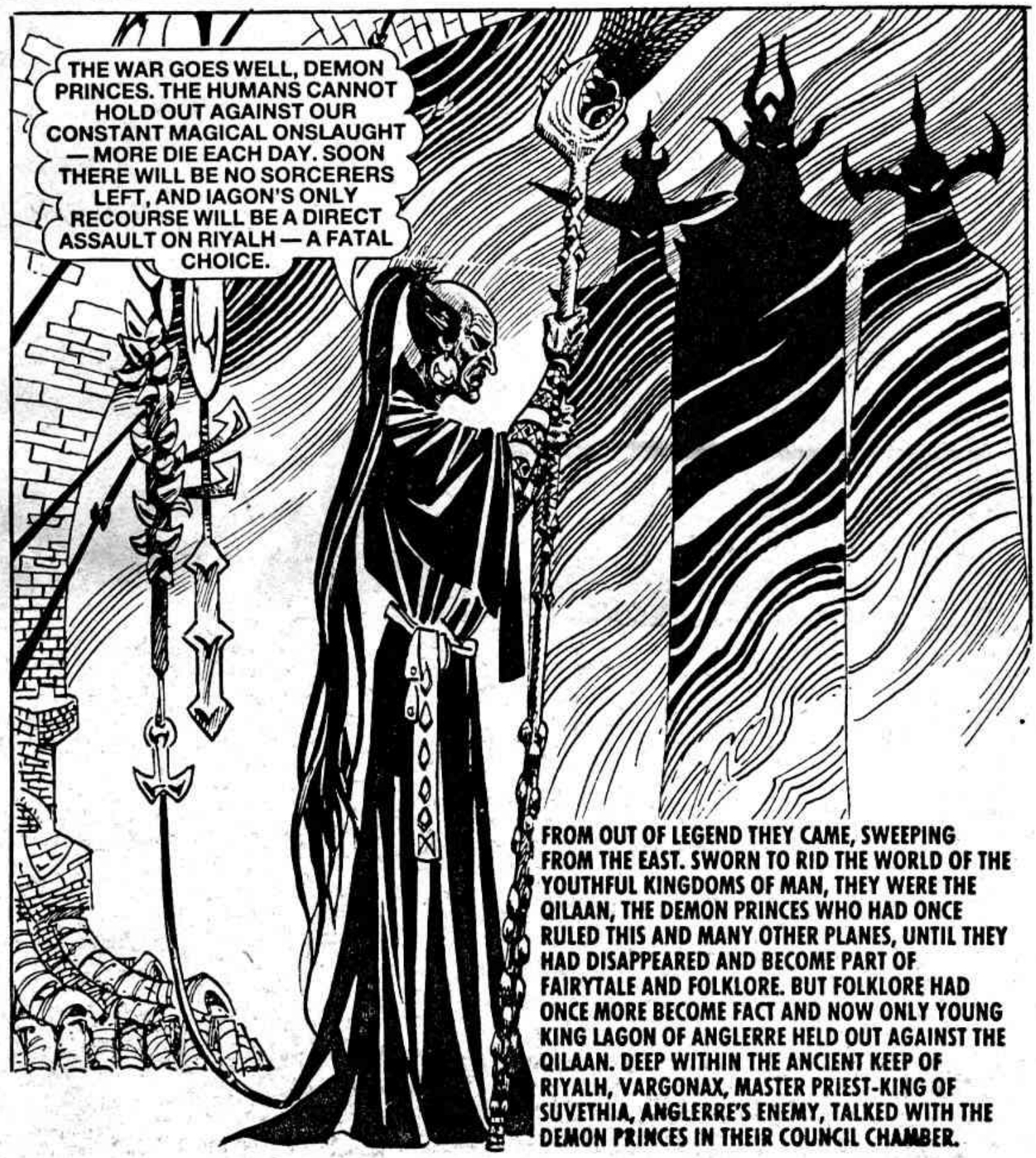


68 PAGES EACH

FOOTBALL LIBRARIES Nos 55+56

NOW ON SALE 28p

RUNEWAR



FROM OUT OF LEGEND THEY CAME, SWEEPING FROM THE EAST. SWORN TO RID THE WORLD OF THE YOUTHFUL KINGDOMS OF MAN, THEY WERE THE QILAAN, THE DEMON PRINCES WHO HAD ONCE RULED THIS AND MANY OTHER PLANES, UNTIL THEY HAD DISAPPEARED AND BECOME PART OF FAIRYTALE AND FOLKLORE. BUT FOLKLORE HAD ONCE MORE BECOME FACT AND NOW ONLY YOUNG KING LAGON OF ANGLERRE HELD OUT AGAINST THE QILAAN. DEEP WITHIN THE ANCIENT KEEP OF RIYALH, VARGONAX, MASTER PRIEST-KING OF SUVETHIA, ANGLERRE'S ENEMY, TALKED WITH THE DEMON PRINCES IN THEIR COUNCIL CHAMBER.

HIGH LORD ACHIOR STEPPED FROM THE SHADOWS — THE RULER OF THE QILAAN HIMSELF.
THIS KING IAGON HAS PROVED A TROUBLESOME PEST — EVEN MORE IRRITATING THAN MOST OF HIS RACE!
BUT ONCE ANGLERRE IS CRUSHED THERE WILL BE LITTLE RESISTANCE LEFT AMONG THESE UPSTART SIMIANS. THE QILAAN WILL ONCE AGAIN BE MASTERS OF THE TEN PLANES, AS WE HAVE BEEN SINCE TIME BEGAN.

IN ILLONDRE, CAPITAL CITY OF ANGLERRE, KING IAGON D'ANNEMARC VISITED THE SORCERERS WITH HIS CLOSEST FRIEND, BARON WYLLAM OF VOST'R.
ONE TOWER LEFT, WYLLAM — AND ONE MAGE-STONE. IS IT REALLY TWO MONTHS SINCE ALL FOUR TOWERS AND STONES WERE IN USE?
I'M AFRAID SO, SIRE. THE SUVETHIAN SENDINGS ARE FAR STRONGER THAN WE'D APPRECIATED.
GODS DEFEND US! ANOTHER ATTACK!
KEEP BACK! DON'T TOUCH HIM!
THE AIR WRITHED BEFORE THE SORCERER, AND A SHAPE TWISTED INTO BEING.

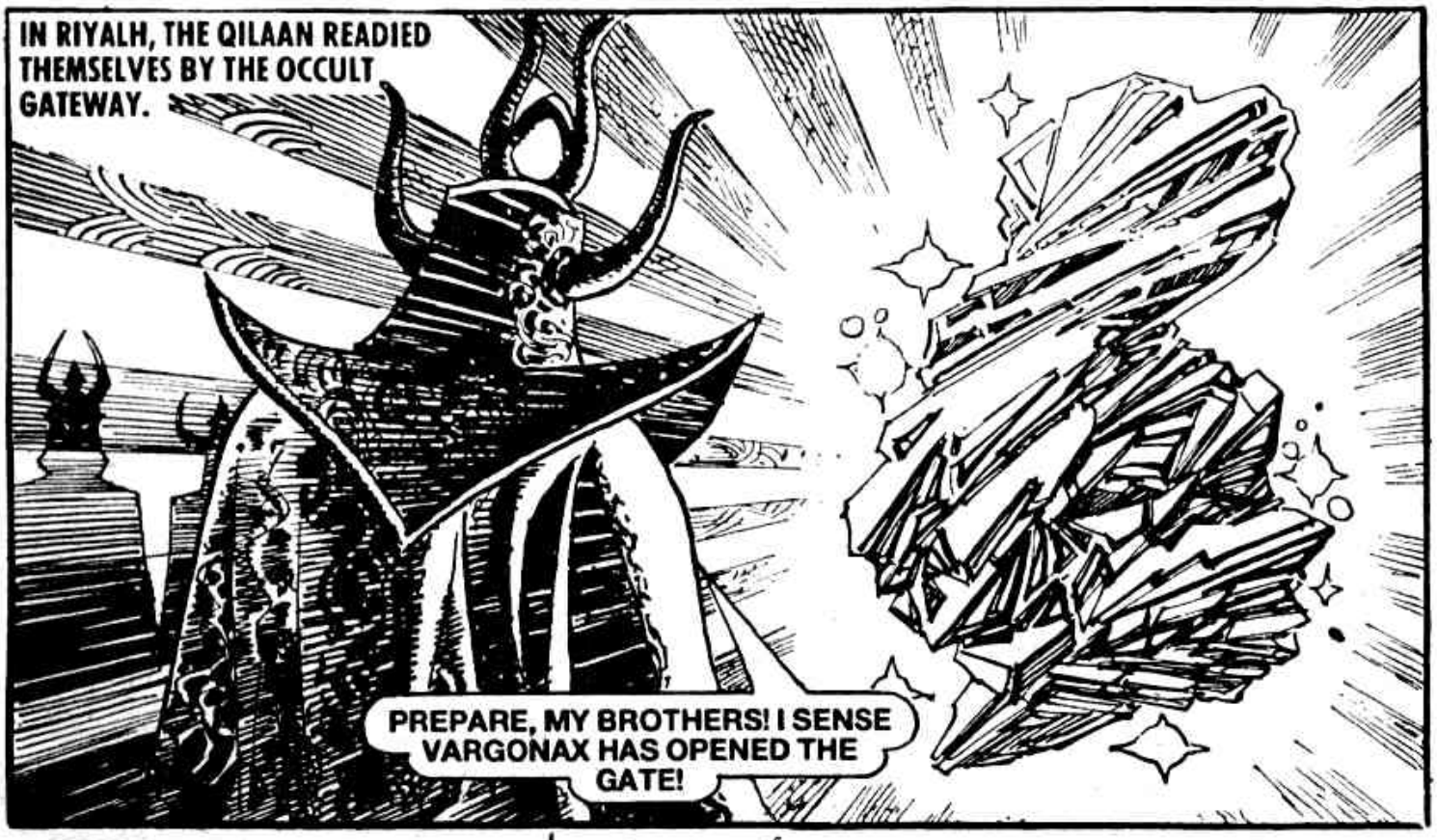
A HIDEOUS DEMON FORMED OUT OF THE SWIRLING AIR.
REFORM THE CIRCLE! NOTHING LESS WILL SUFFICE!

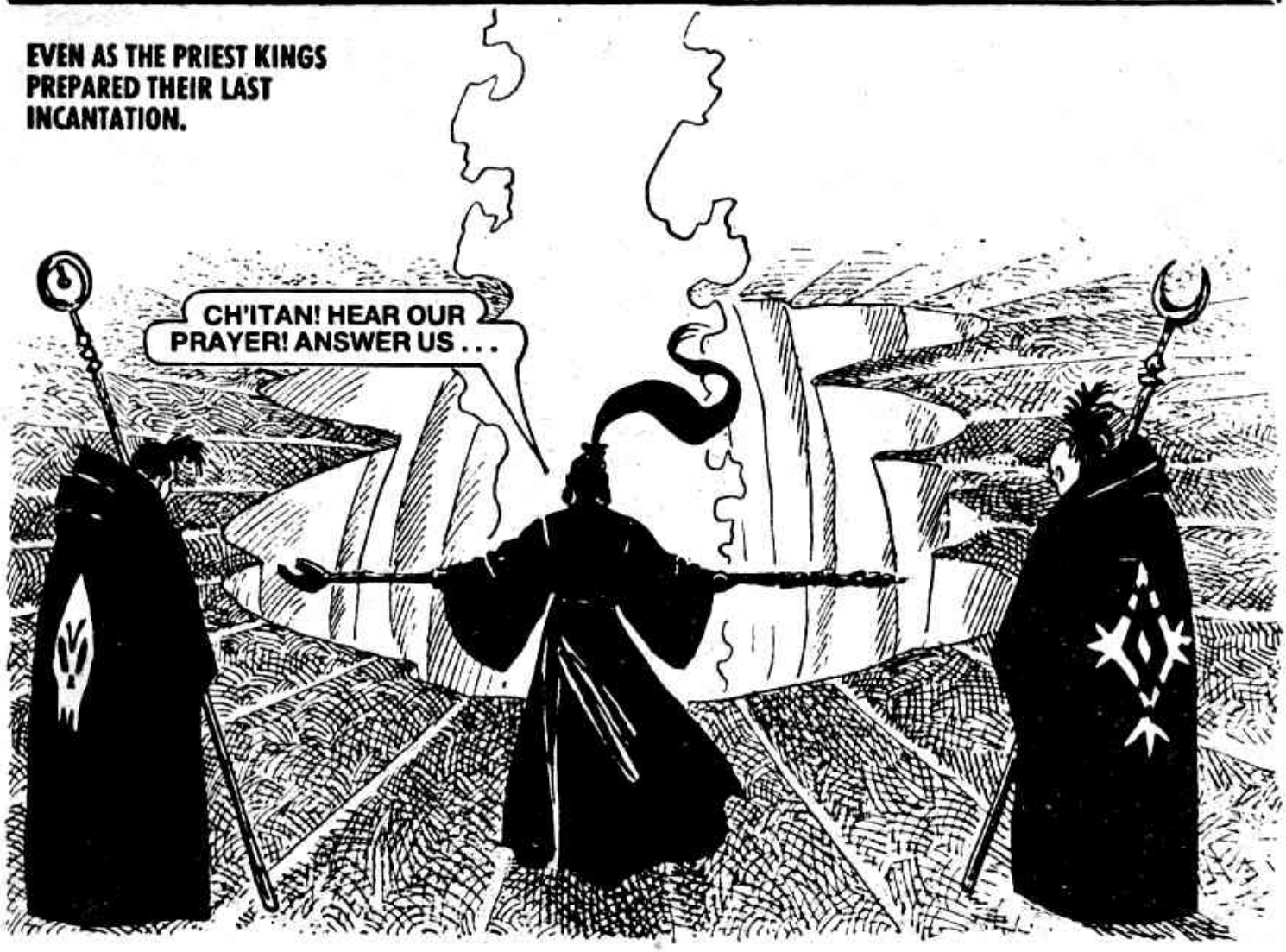
GET BACK TO THE PIT THAT SPAWNED THEE, DEMON!
SIRE! TAKE CARE.
IF YOU'RE SURE YOU'VE FINISHED PLAYING THE HERO, SIRE.
IT'S GONE, WYLLAM! WE'LL LEAVE THE OTHERS TO CONTINUE THEIR WORK.

LATER —
WHAT KIND OF WAR IS THIS, WYLLAM? AN ENEMY I CAN'T SEE, OR TOUCH! ONE I CAN'T DRIVE A SWORD THROUGH!
THE SORCERERS ARE IN CHARGE, SIRE. MAGIC IS THEIR SPECIAL PROVINCE. THE FIELD OF BATTLE IS OURS.
AND THESE DEMON PRINCES — WHAT ARE THEY? FROM WHENCE HAVE THEY SO SUDDENLY SPRUNG?
THERE WERE DEMON PRINCES IN LEGEND, SIRE, BUT I HARDLY THINK THESE ARE THE SAME. THE LEGENDARY QILAAN WERE VANQUISHED AND EXILED.

AND THAT NIGHT, IN GOH-MYRETH, CAPITAL OF SUVETHIA, THE PRIEST-KINGS MET TO DISCUSS THEIR FINAL ASSAULT.
AT THE MOMENT THE MOON IS SWALLOWED BY THE HORIZON, THE DEMON PRINCES WILL UNITE AND POUR THEIR LIMITLESS POWER THROUGH OUR OCCULT GATEWAY.

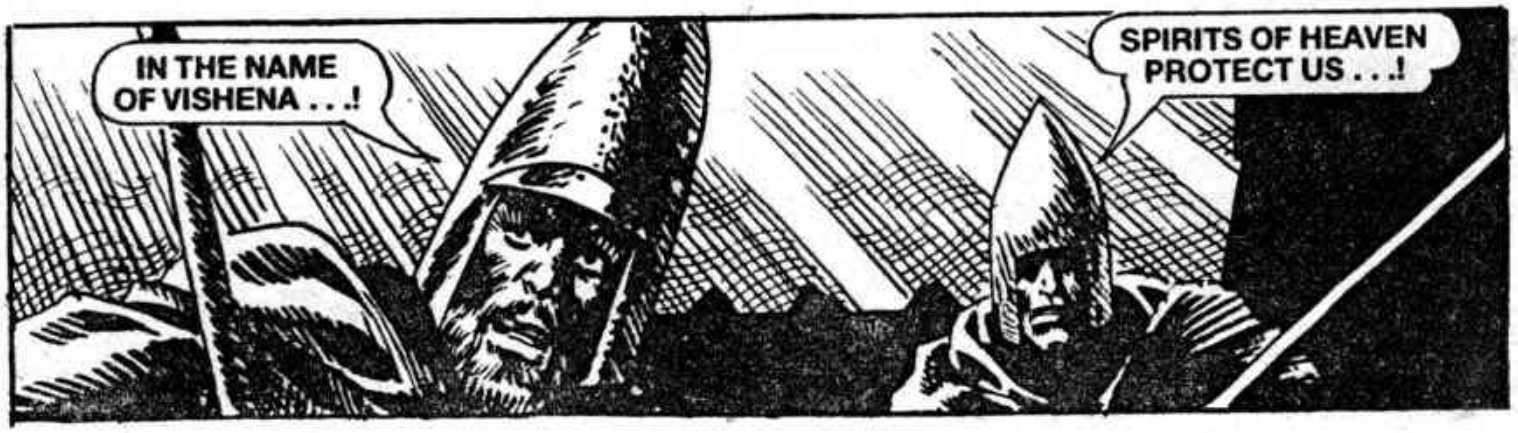
WHILST THE DEMON PRINCES OCCUPY THEMSELVES DESTROYING THE HUMANS, WE SHALL ANNEX ILLONDRE, AND ANGLERRE ITSELF! THE WEAKENED QILAAN WILL FALL EASY PREY TO OUR SORCERY — AND THE WORLD WILL BE OURS!
ILLONDRE SLEPT ON, UNAWARE OF THE GROWING THREAT.
IT'S COLD TONIGHT, BRYN!
SOON BE THE NEXT WATCH, THOUGH. THEN IT'S A ROARING FIRE AND HOT PUNCH FOR ME.


IN RIYALH, THE QILAAN READIED THEMSELVES BY THE OCCULT GATEWAY.
PREPARE, MY BROTHERS! I SENSE VARGONAX HAS OPENED THE GATE!


EVEN AS THE PRIEST KINGS PREPARED THEIR LAST INCANTATION.
CH'ITAN! HEAR OUR PRAYER! ANSWER US . . .

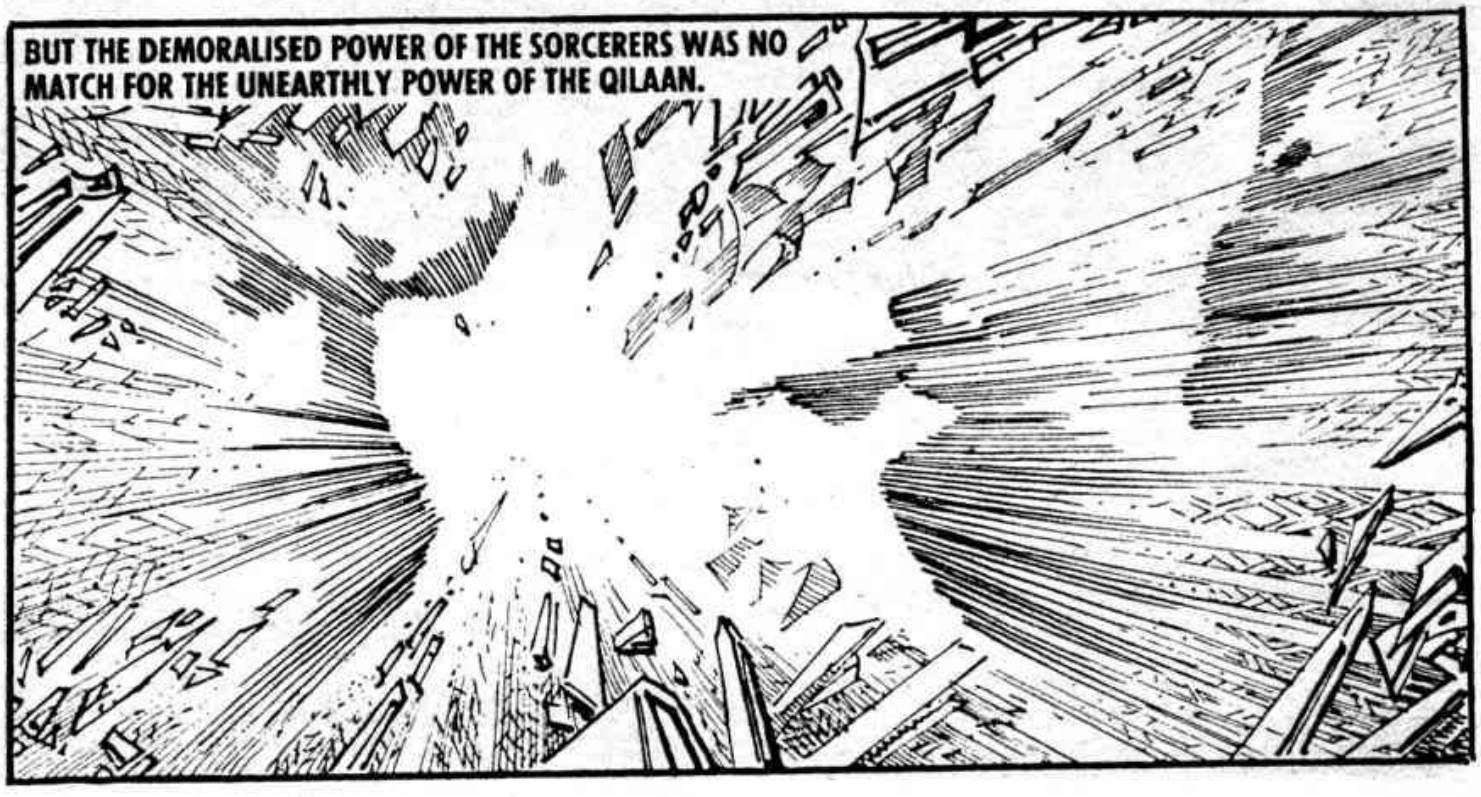
NOW!

THE ARCANE POWERS MET AND JOINED, FORMING AN UNBEATABLE SPELL OF DESTRUCTION.



WITH A SILENCE MORE CHILLING THAN ANY SOUND, THE DEADLY ENCHANTMENT FROM GOH-MYRETH SHATTERED ILLONDRE'S PARAPETS LIKE AN ARROW THROUGH MATCHWOOD.

IN THE TOWER OF THE SORCERERS, SUDDEN TERROR BROKE OUT.
CHULT'R SAVE US! THE MAGE-GEM IS UNDER SIEGE!
STAND FIRM! FORM A UNITED FRONT OR WE ARE DOOMED!


BUT THE DEMORALISED POWER OF THE SORCERERS WAS NO MATCH FOR THE UNEARTHLY POWER OF THE QILAAN.

KRASH
MERCIFUL GODS!
IAGON AND WYLLAM COULD ONLY STARE AT THE DEBRIS.
THE GODS REST THEIR SOULS!
SO — THE SUVETHIAN SPELL-SINGERS AND THESE DEMON PRINCES HAVE WON THEIR FIRST BATTLE! BUT THE WAR IS FAR FROM OVER!
WE MARCH IN THE MORNING, WYLLAM! THIS KEEP OF RIYALH IS TO THE SOUTH, I BELIEVE?
BUT THE DEMON PRINCES, SIRE! WHAT IF THEY ARE THE LEGENDARY QILAAN?

FAR AWAY TO THE SOUTH, VARGONAX LOST NO TIME IN PROCLAIMING VICTORY.

TO US BE THE GLORY! THE LAST SORCERER OF ANGLERRE DIED BY THE HANDS OF THE PRIEST-KINGS THIS VERY HOUR! SUVETHIA IS TRIUMPHANT!

BEFORE THE SUN SETS AGAIN, ILLONDRE WILL BE OURS! WITH THE HUMANS OF ANGLERRE OUR SLAVES, NOT EVEN THE QILAAN WILL STAND IN OUR WAY!
SO — AS I SUSPECTED, OUR ALLIES GROW AMBITIOUS. LET HIM TAKE THE HUMAN CITY — ONCE THIS HALF-APE IAGON HAS BEEN DESTROYED, VARGONAX AND HIS DISCIPLES WILL FIND THE SORCERY OF QILAAN MORE THAN ENOUGH TO CLEANSE THE WORLD OF THEIR PRESENCE!
BUT VARGONAX'S MOMENT OF TRIUMPH WAS WATCHED BY OTHER, MORE ANCIENT EYES.

MORNING BROKE OVER ILLONDRE, AND THE MUSTERED TROOPS ASSEMBLED OUTSIDE THE WALLS.
I AM RELUCTANT TO DO THIS, WYLLAM. SPLITTING OUR FORCES WILL WEAKEN THE ATTACK ON RIYALH.
AYE, SIRE. BUT WE CANNOT LEAVE ILLONDRE UNDEFENDED!
THEN I LEAVE ANGLERRE IN YOUR CAPABLE HANDS, WYLL. WHAT'S THIS COMING?
GODS ABOVE! AN ARMY FROM THE WEST!

THE NEWCOMERS HALTED BEFORE IAGON'S TROOPS.

I AM KING IAGON OF ANGLERRE, AND I GREET YOU ALL. MIGHT I ENQUIRE YOUR NAME AND PURPOSE HERE?

I AM MYKI SALADOTH, SIRDAH OF ABARIA. WE HAVE RECENTLY LANDED AT THE PORT OF BRAS'L, AND RIDDEN HARD TO MEET YOU TO ASK IF THESE MEN WILL BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SERVICE, TO FIGHT THE HEATHEN THAT NOW OPPRESS THESE SHORES.

THE GODS WATCH OVER YOU, SIRE, AND SEND YOU A SWIFT VICTORY. HAVE NO FEAR FOR ILLONDRE — I WILL KEEP HER SAFE UNTIL YOUR RETURN.
BUT AS WYLLAM ENTERED THE THRONE ROOM TO REPORT TO THE COURT, A TERRIBLE SHOCK AWAITED HIM.
GOOD MORROW, BARON WYLLAM OF VOST'R. A PRETTY SPEECH — BUT I SEE IAGON'S MEN CANNOT KEEP THEIR VOWS FOR EVEN A FEW MOMENTS. BE ASSURED THAT WILL CHANGE NOW I AM IN CHARGE.
VARGONAX! BY WHAT FOUL MAGIC DID YOU ARRIVE HERE?
NONE YOU UNDERSTAND! TAKE HIM AWAY! WE'LL AMUSE OURSELVES WITH HIM AFTER IAGON AND THE QILAAN ARE DESTROYED.

AS THE HUMAN ARMY MOVED SOUTH, KING IAGON AND THE ABARIC COMMANDER GREW TO KNOW EACH OTHER BETTER.
ALTHOUGH THE POWERS OF SORCERY LIE ALL AROUND US, NO ABARIAN WOULD CARE TO DABBLE WITH IT IN ANY FORM.
AN ADMIRABLE VIEWPOINT, SIRDAH SALADOTH. I MYSELF HAVE FOUND LITTLE TO RECOMMEND IN SORCERY.
SUDDENLY A RAGGED BAND OF DISEASED CREATURES LEAPT UPON THE ARMY.
BY CHULT'R! WHAT ARE THOSE DEMONS?
THEY WERE MEN ONCE, SALADOTH! THE TERRIBLE MAGICS USED IN THIS WAR HAVE WARPED BOTH THEIR MINDS AND BODIES. SUCH ATTACKS ARE COMMON.

IT SEEMS TO ME THEY ATTACK ARMOURED TROOPS SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY WISH TO DIE.
OUTNUMBERED AND UNDER-ARMED, THE CREATURES CONTINUED TO ATTACK THE COLUMN UNTIL NOT ONE REMAINED LIVING.

NOW PERHAPS YOU UNDERSTAND MY HATRED OF SORCERY?
SILENTLY, THE TROOPS RODE FROM THE BLOODY SCENE.

IAGON'S PROGRESS WAS WATCHED WITH COLD CURIOSITY IN RIYALH.
SO, THE HUMAN DESPISES MAGICKRY? THEN LET US SEND HIM A FOE WORTHY OF HIS LOFTY IDEALS! SHAANOR — HOW DOES YOUR WORK PROGRESS?
I, SHAANOR THE GATEMASTER, HAVE UNLOCKED SEVEN OF THE GATES TO THE TEN PLANES. THE LAST THREE WILL FOLLOW SHORTLY.
EXCELLENT! THEN LET US RELEASE A SQUAD OF IXSSAASHI ON THE SIMIANS — OPPONENTS WORTHY OF OUR BRAVE KING'S METTLE.

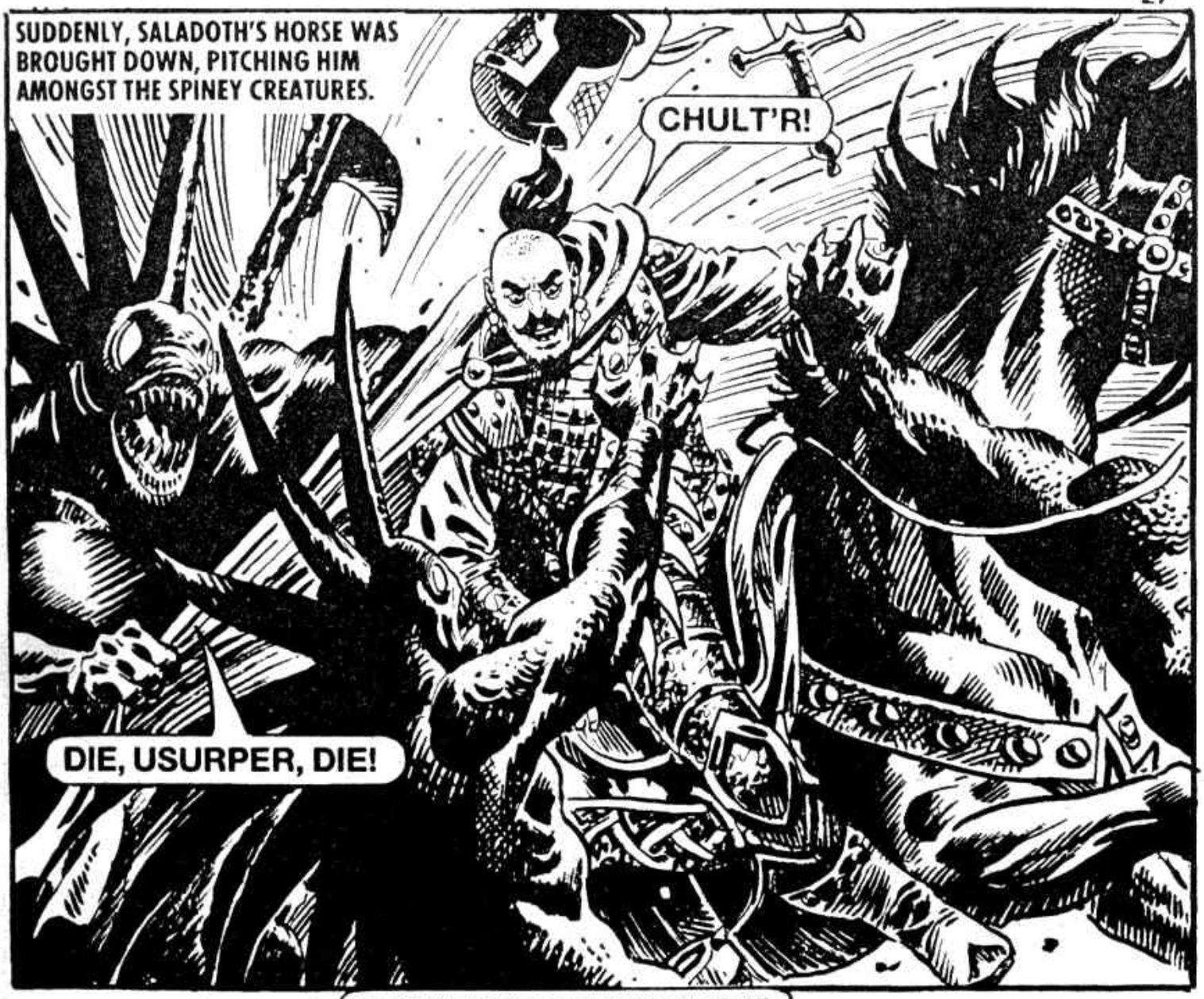
WITH THE SPEED OF THOUGHT, ACHIOR MOVED HIMSELF TO AN ALIEN DIMENSION, WHERE THE FISH-LIKE IXSSAASHI LIVED.
DO REVERENCE TO YOUR MASTERS, CREATURES — FOR THE QILAAN HAVE RETURNED, AND REQUIRE YOUR SERVICES.
WHAT SERVICE MAY THY HUMBLE SERVANTS DO FOR THEE, LORD?

PANIC REIGNED AS THE CREATURES BURST THROUGH, JUST IN FRONT OF THE ARMY.

VISHENA! WHAT MANNER OF CREATURES . . .?

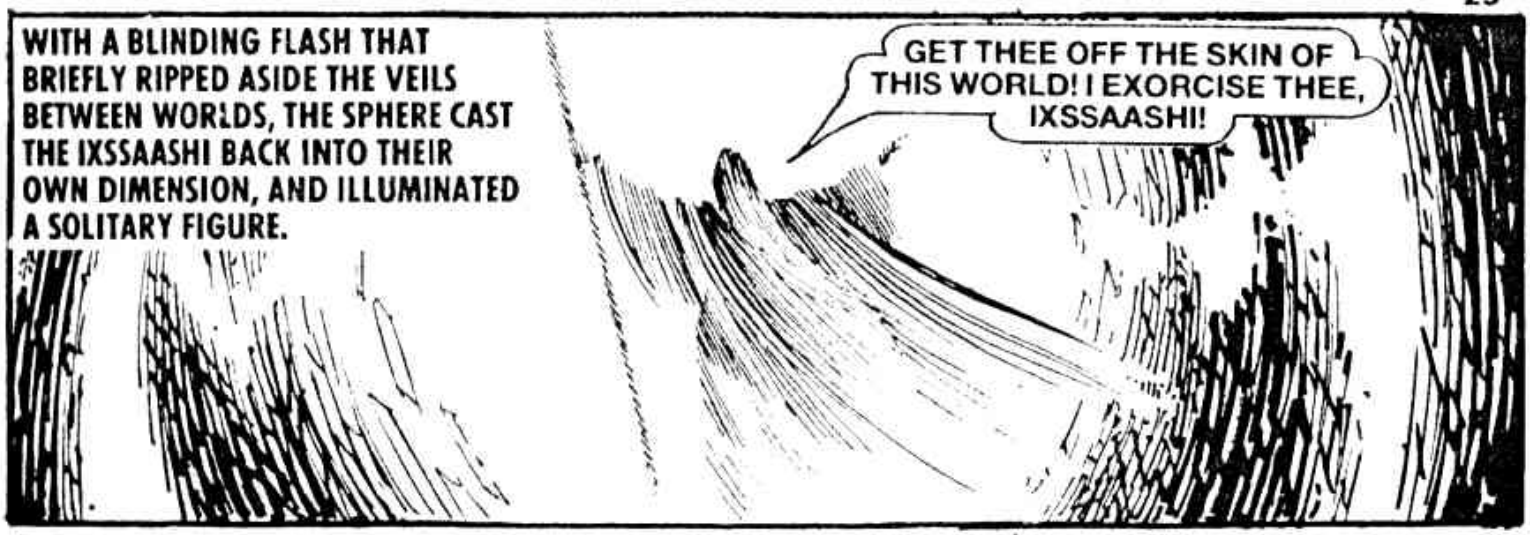
BY ALL THE GODS, MY LIEGE! DO WE FIGHT FISH-MEN NOW?

THOSE SPINES CARRY VENOM! EVEN ARMOUR IS NOT PROOF AGAINST IT!
MEN FELL IN AGONY AS THE DEADLY POISON ATE THROUGH FLESH AND ARMOUR ALIKE.
CAN THESE BE SOME CREATURES OF THE DEMON PRINCES?
I CANNOT BELIEVE IT! SUVETHIA HAS EVER BEEN THE TRUE ENEMY!
IAGON COULD NOT BRING HIMSELF TO ACCEPT THE QUILAAN WERE SO POWERFUL.


SUDDENLY, SALADOTH'S HORSE WAS BROUGHT DOWN, PITCHING HIM AMONGST THE SPINEY CREATURES.
CHULT'R!
DIE, USURPER, DIE!

TAKE HIM OUT OF THIS, YOU MEN! THEN REGROUP AND FORM A RETREAT!
AYE, KING IAGON.
ALTHOUGH RESCUED, SALADOTH CLUTCHED HIS FACE WHERE A DROP OF THE CREATURE'S CORROSIVE BLOOD HAD SPLASHED HIM.

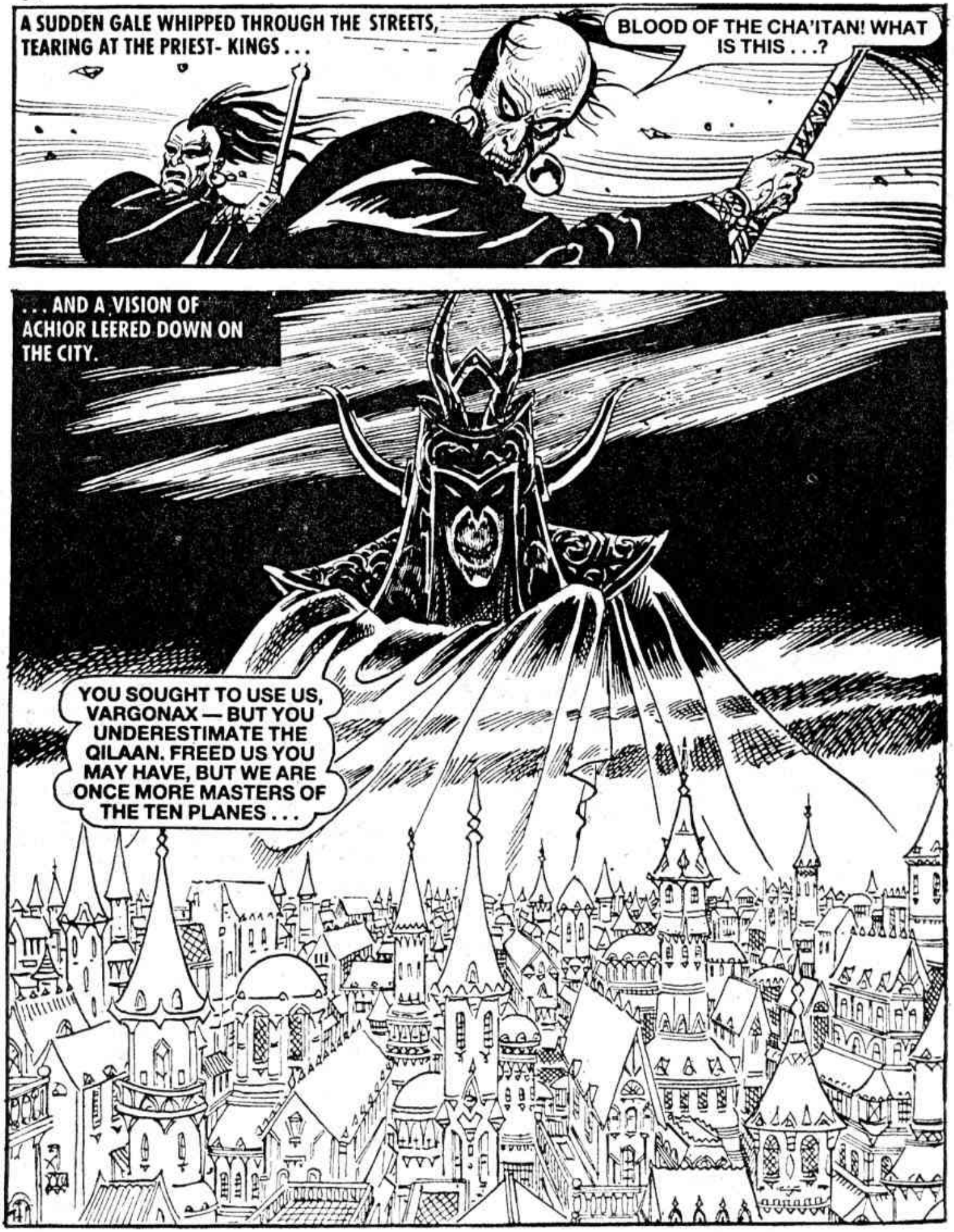
FALL BACK!
RETREATING SLOWLY, IAGON'S TROOPS STILL TOOK A GRISLY TOLL OF THE FISH-MEN.
SUDDENLY, A GLOWING OCCULT SHIELD SPRANG UP BETWEEN THE TWO FORCES, SEPARATING THEM COMPLETELY.
WHAT IS THIS?
SORCERY! YET WHAT POWER IS GREATER THAN THE QILAAN?
IT SEEMS WE ARE SAVED. BUT BY WHOM — AND FOR WHAT PURPOSE?
THE SHIELD EXPANDED, GROWING INTO A SPHERE THAT ENCOMPASSED THE ENTIRE IXSSAASHI FORCES.


WITH A BLINDING FLASH THAT BRIEFLY RIPPED ASIDE THE VEILS BETWEEN WORLDS, THE SPHERE CAST THE IXSSAASHI BACK INTO THEIR OWN DIMENSION, AND ILLUMINATED A SOLITARY FIGURE.
GET THEE OFF THE SKIN OF THIS WORLD! I EXORCISE THEE, IXSSAASHI!

KING IAGON APPROACHED THE DARK-CLAD STRANGER.
GREETINGS, KING IAGON D'ANNEMARC, I MUST APOLOGISE FOR MY TARDY ARRIVAL.
WHO ARE YOU, SIR? AM I TO TAKE IT YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR SAVING US?

I AM MYRDAN, CALLED RAVEN BY SOME, SINCE I'M ALWAYS NEAR TROUBLE. AYE, I BANISHED THE IXSSAASHI HORDE. 'TWAS EASY ENOUGH, SINCE ONLY A QILAAN DISPLACEMENT SPELL HELD THEM HERE. CUT THAT OFF, AND THIS WORLD SIMPLY REJECTS THEM.
BUT BEFORE AUGHT ELSE, I MUST TREAT THE WOUNDED. IXSSAASHI VENOM IS FATAL — EVEN THE SMALLEST DROP WILL KILL WITHIN DAYS.
STRIDING AWAY FROM THE KING, THE ONE CALLED MYRDAN MADE DIRECTLY FOR THE ARMY.
MOVING SWIFTLY THROUGH THE RANKS, MYRDAN TENDED EACH MAN WITH HEALING SPELLS, FINALLY COMING TO SALADOTH.
I'VE ANNULLED THE POISON, SIRDAH SALADOTH — BUT I FEAR YOU HAVE LOST YOUR EYE FOR GOOD.
I HAVE ANOTHER, SIR WIZARD. AND THE BLOOD OF THESE QILAAN WILL BE PAYMENT ENOUGH FOR THE LOSS.
DESPITE HIMSELF, IAGON FELT A LIKING FOR THE JAUNTY, DISRESPECTFUL STRANGER.

THE QUILAAN WATCHED IN ANGER AND OUTRAGE.
THIS IS BEYOND BELIEF! AN ETERNAL HELPING THE HUMANS!
AND MYRDAN OF ALL PEOPLE. I THOUGHT HIM SLAIN BY THE TLIGO CENTURIES AGO.
FORGET THE HUMANS FOR NOW! WITH RAVEN MYRDAN AIDING THEM I WILL NEED TO THINK MORE. LET US INSTEAD SETTLE WITH VARGONAX AND HIS TREACHEROUS PRIEST-KINGS.
IN ILLONDRE, THE MASTER PRIEST-KING WAS STROLLING THROUGH HIS NEW DOMAIN.
SEE HOW THEY COWER, SUBARAX. ALREADY THEY ACKNOWLEDGE ME AS THEIR MASTER. ONCE WE HAVE DEALT WITH THE QILAAN THIS LAND WILL BE MOST PLEASANT, I THINK.
AYE, MASTER VARGONAX.


A SUDDEN GALE WHIPPED THROUGH THE STREETS, TEARING AT THE PRIEST- KINGS . . .
BLOOD OF THE CHA'ITAN! WHAT IS THIS . . .?
. . . AND A VISION OF ACHIOR LEERED DOWN ON THE CITY.
YOU SOUGHT TO USE US, VARGONAX — BUT YOU UNDERESTIMATE THE QILAAN. FREED US YOU MAY HAVE, BUT WE ARE ONCE MORE MASTERS OF THE TEN PLANES . . .

WE ARE NOW YOUR MASTERS, SUVETHIANS! AND AS SUCH, WE DECREE YOUR DESTRUCTION!
AWESOME POWER RAINED DOWN ON ILLONDRE, BURNING AND DESTROYING LIKE MOLTEN LAVA.
WHILST IAGON, UNAWARE OF HIS CITY'S FATE, ARGUED WITH SALADOTH AND THE NEWCOMER.
I ASSURE YOU, MAJESTY, THE QILAAN ARE INDEED THE CREATURES OF LEGEND, RELEASED BY THE SUVETHIAN PRIEST-KINGS! YOU CANNOT FACE THEM THIS WAY!
WHY SHOULD I TRUST YOU MORE THAN ANY OTHER SPELL-SINGER?

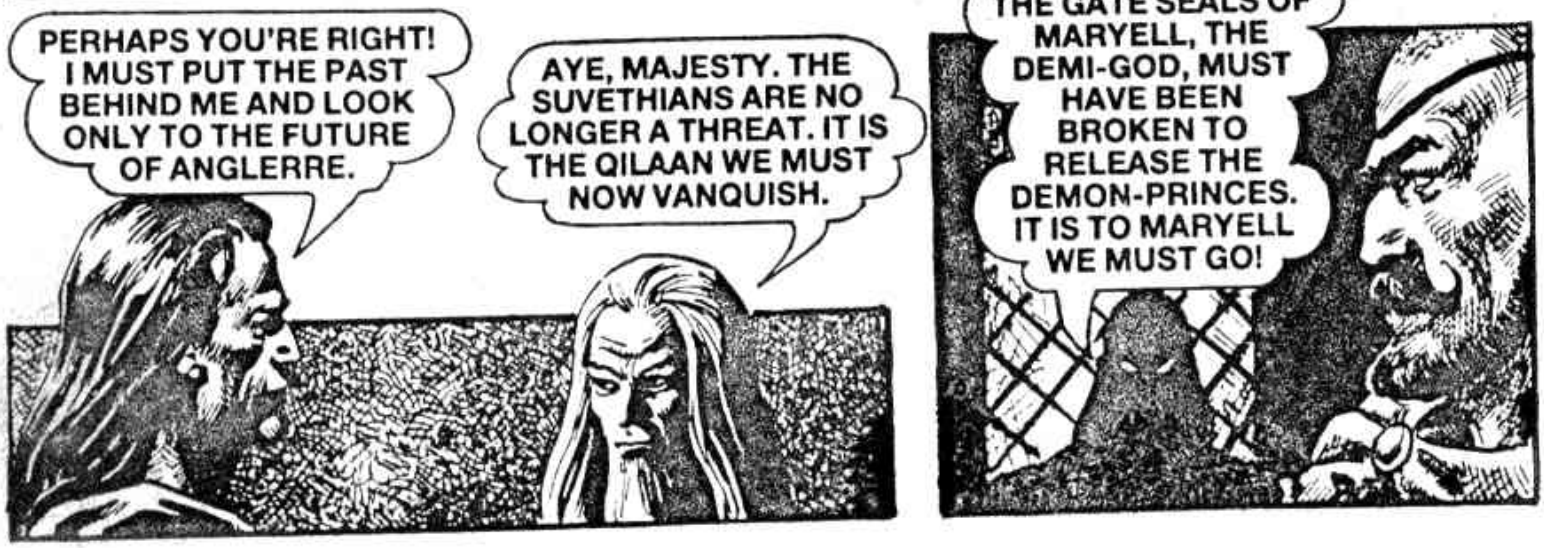
BUT WHEN THEY REACHED ILLONDRE, NO ONE WAS PREPARED FOR THE SIGHT THAT GREETED THEM.

BEFORE THEM LAY ILLONDRE — OR WHAT WAS LEFT OF IT. ACHIOR HAD CRUSHED THE CITY WITH NO MORE REGARD THAN A MAN TRAMPLING AN ANT'S NEST. THE ONLY SIGNS OF LIFE VISIBLE WERE THE BLACK-WINGED CROWS AND VULTURES CIRCLING OVERHEAD.
THEY RODE INTO THE CITY OF HORROR . . .
IT IS AS I FEARED. THE SUVETHIANS OCCUPIED THE CITY THE MOMENT YOU WERE GONE, EXPECTING THE QILAAN TO BE WEAKENED BY YOUR ATTACK, AND THUS EASY PREY. INSTEAD, ACHIOR STRUCK FIRST!
INSIDE THE THRONE ROOM WAS NO BETTER.
BY VISHENA! IS THERE NOWHERE UNTOUCHED!

YOUR MAJESTY! PRAISE THE GODS YOU ARE SAFE!
WYLLAM!
VARGONAX AND HIS DOGS . . . TORTURED ME AND OTHERS OF THE COURT. . . TO AMUSE THEMSELVES . . . THEN THE QILAAN STRUCK . . . VARGONAX AND HIS SCUM ARE DEAD . . .
I . . . WAITED YOUR RETURN, MY LIEGE . . . I KNEW YOU WOULD NEVER . . . UUHH . . . !
WYLL! WYLL!

WHAT HAVE I DONE? MY FRIENDS, MY CAPITAL CITY — ALL DESTROYED THROUGH MY OWN STUPIDITY!

NO . . . HOW COULD YOU ANTICIPATE SUCH POWER?



IAGON CALLED A MEETING OF HIS COMMANDERS.

YOU MENTIONED MARYELL EARLIER, MYRDAN. ARE WE THEN TO ASSUME HE IS AS REAL AND LIVING AS THESE QILAAN, AND THAT WE CAN IN SOME WAY REACH HIM?

AYE, MAJESTY. MARYELL IS AN ETERNAL — ONE OF SEVERAL RACES WHOSE LIFE SPAN IS FAR BEYOND ANY MORTALS. HE AND HIS BROTHERS HAVE WAGED WAR AGAINST THE QILAAN AND THEIR KIN FOR MILLIONS OF YEARS.

IRONICALLY, NOW THAT THE QILAAN HAVE RE-OPENED THE GATES TO THE TEN PLANES, IT IS MUCH EASIER FOR US TO JOURNEY TO MARYELL'S WORLD.

MAJESTY! SIRDAH! LOOK — LOOK WHO WE HAVE FOUND HIDING IN THE RUINS!

A WEARY BAND OF HUMANS STAGGERED INTO THE ROOM, BATTERED AND BRUISED, BUT ALIVE.

I CANNOT BELIEVE IT! SO MANY HAVE ESCAPED THE DESTRUCTION AFTER ALL?

LEAVING THE SURVIVORS TO BE CARED FOR BY THE TROOPS, IAGON AND HIS NEW COMPANIONS WENT TO THE CITY'S RUINED CENTRAL SQUARE.

WE GO FROM HERE, MYRDAN?

YES . . . THE QILAAN'S OWN MEDDLING WILL MAKE OUR PASSAGE EASIER. IN THIS CITY, WHERE THE POWER OF THE DEMON PRINCES HAS BEEN FELT SO KEENLY, I CAN TAP THE DISRUPTION ALREADY CAUSED TO FORGE A SIMPLE GATEWAY.

AS EACH TONGUE-TWISTING WORD WAS SPOKEN, THE VERY AIR CRACKLED WITH POWER, AND AN OPENING SWIRLED INTO SHAPE BEFORE THE WIZARD.

WITH HEART-STOPPING SUDDENNESS, THE THREE MEN WERE SUCKED FROM THEIR OWN WORLD, AND DROPPED INTO A WEIRD AND UNFAMILIAR ONE.
A NIGHTMARE!

TWO PALLID SUNS GLOWED IN A CRIMSON SKY, AND VEGETATION OF UNEARTHLY HUES COVERED THE LAND.
CHULT'R! THIS SHOULDN'T BE HAPPENING TO A DECENT, GOD-FEARING ABARIC! IS THERE NO SANITY LEFT IN THE WORLD?
I APOLOGISE FOR THE ABRUPT TRANSFERENCE — I NEVER GUESSED IT WOULD BE SO VIOLENT. I CAN ONLY ASSUME FROM THE STRENGTH OF THE PULL, THAT . . .

CORRECT, RAVEN — I DRAW YOU ALL HENCE. WELCOME TO BAROFONN.

LORD MARYELL! IT IS GRATIFYING TO BE SO WANTED.
I HAVE BEEN AWAITING YOUR ARRIVAL, RAVEN, EVER SINCE I REALISED THE QILAAN HAD BEEN SET FREE. I GUESSED IT WOULD NOT BE LONG BEFORE YOU WERE OFFERING ME AID ONCE AGAIN.
OFFERING AID AGAIN, MYRDAN?
AH — DID I NEGLECT TO TELL YOU, MAJESTY? WHEN MARYELL LAST BOUND THE QILAAN AND SEALED THEIR GATES, I WAS HONOURED TO BE ABLE TO HELP — IN A SMALL WAY.
WHAT HE MEANS, KING IAGON D'ANNEMARC, IS THAT HE INTERFERED — AS HE ALWAYS WILL. NEVER HAS THERE BEEN AN ETERNAL SO INTENT ON MEDDLING IN THE AFFAIRS OF OTHERS.
MYRDAN! AN ETERNAL?

MARYELL TURNED AWAY AND BEGAN TO WALK ACROSS THE STRANGE LANDSCAPE.
AYE — RAVEN MYRDAN IS MANY THINGS, KING IAGON: MAGICIAN, ETERNAL, CONFIDANT TO THE GODS THEMSELVES. AND EVEN MYRDAN ISN'T HIS TRUE NAME. NOW, MAKE HASTE — THE SHADOW-FORTRESS OF HAYLIR IS THIS WAY.
YOU MUST EXCUSE MARYELL, MAJESTY. EVEN FOR AN ETERNAL HE TALKS TOO MUCH.

MY KING, DO YOU UNDERSTAND ANY OF THIS?
I'VE GIVEN UP TRYING, SIRDAH SALADOTH. WE'RE IN THE HANDS OF GREATER BEINGS. FOR NOW, I'M CONTENT TO BE LED.
SO SAYING, IAGON LED THE ABARIC AFTER THE RETREATING BACKS OF THE ETERNALS.

AFTER ONLY A SHORT WALK, THEY REACHED THE BROW OF A GREAT CLIFF, AND BELOW THEM . . .
BEHOLD — HAYLIR, THE SHADOW-KEEP.
IT LOOKS LIKE A DESERT MIRAGE. WHAT IS OUR CONNECTION WITH IT?

THE QILAAN KEEP OF RIYALH CASTS MANY A SHADOW IN THE TEN PLANES, AND BEYOND. THIS IS ONE SHADOW — HALYIR IN BAROFONN. WE COULD NEVER HOPE TO INVADE RIYALH ITSELF, BUT BY ENTERING THIS REFLECTION AND MOVING BACK TO YOUR OWN WORLD, WE WILL FIND OURSELVES IN THE CENTRE OF THE QILAAN FORTRESS.
AYE — THE HEART OF THE DEMON PRINCES' POWER!

EVENTUALLY THEY STOOD BEFORE HALYIR'S MASSIVE GATES.
WE ARE HERE, RAVEN. ARE YOU READY?
AS EVER, MARYELL.

YNGTHA!!
WITH A DEAFENING ROAR, THE GATES EXPLODED APART AS THE ETERNALS LINKED THEIR POWER . . .

. . . AND SOMETHING FROM NO SANE WORLD RUSHED OUT.
VISHENA SAVE US!
STAY BACK! THIS IS MINE!

KING IAGON WATCHED SPELLBOUND AT THE POWER AND SPEED OF THE ETERNAL, IN A STYLE OF FIGHTING HE HAD NEVER BEFORE WITNESSED.

AND IN A MOMENT IT WAS OVER — THE HIDEOUS THING CLEAVED IN TWO BY A SINGLE BLOW.
BY ALL THE GODS, LORD MARYELL! NEVER HAVE I SEEN SUCH SPEED AND SKILL! WITH SUCH AS YOU TO AID US, THE QILAAN ARE ALREADY DEFEATED!
DO NOT SPEAK TOO HASTILY, KING IAGON. A GUARDIAN SUCH AS THIS IS NO MATCH FOR ANY ETERNAL, BUT BE CERTAIN THAT AT THE HEART OF HALYIR LIES A POWER GREATER THAN ANY ONE MAN — A VELANKE'EN!

IAGON AND HIS COMPANIONS STEPPED INSIDE THE KEEP, AND INTO A BIZARRE LANDSCAPE.
CHULT'R SAVE US! IS THIS SOME AWFUL NIGHTMARE?
HALYIR IS A SHADOW, IAGON — LITTLE MORE THAN A DREAM OF THE TRUE KEEP, RIYALH.
HALYIR SEEKS TO DEFEND ITSELF, MAJESTY. THESE ILLUSIONS ARE HARMLESS — MEANT ONLY TO DETER THOSE OF LITTLE WILLPOWER.
I'VE GOT NEWS FOR YOU, MAGICIAN — IT'S WORKING!
THEY PRESSED ON, THROUGH SHIFTING IMAGES AND SUDDEN DEAFENING NOISES . . .

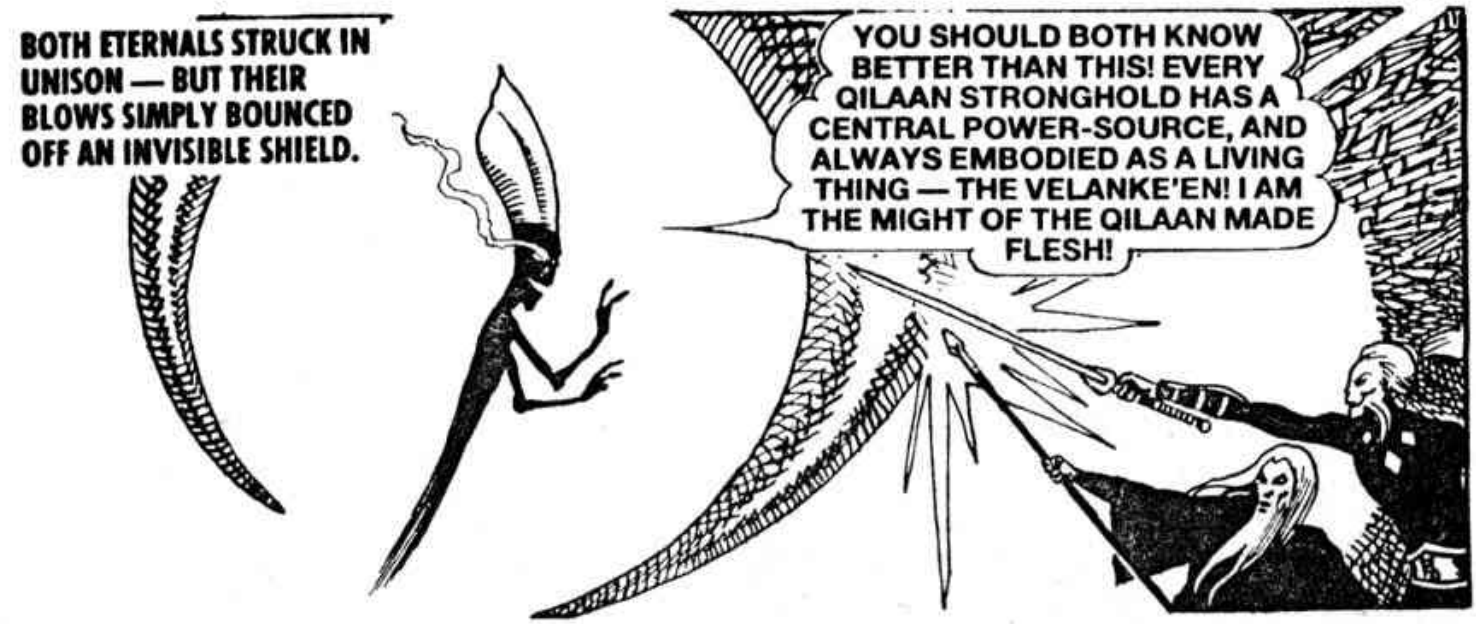
UNTIL THEY CAME TO . . .
WE HAVE ARRIVED. BE NOT DISCONCERTED, LORD KING — THESE IMAGES MASK OUR TRUE DANGER. SOMEWHERE WITHIN THIS DREAMSCAPE LURKS THE VELANKE'EN, AND ALL ITS MINIONS.

EVEN AS MARYELL SPOKE, CORPSE-LIKE CREATURES APPEARED OUT OF NOWHERE.
BEWARE, LORD KING! THESE CREATURES ARE NOT THE WALKING CORPSES THEY APPEAR.
AT LAST — A FOE I CAN MEET FACE TO FACE!
THEY'RE FAST! I SEE WHAT YOU MEAN, LORD MARYELL!

THERE, MY LIEGE! THAT MAKES IT MORE EVEN!
MY THANKS, SALADOTH!
MORTALLY WOUNDED, THE CREATURES DIED WITHOUT A SOUND — AND NO BLOOD FLOWED FROM THE SWORD CUTS.
LIKE OLD TIMES, EH, MARYELL?
AYE, RAVEN. THOUGH AGE DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE WEAKENED THIS VELANKE'EN.
FINALLY, THE LAST ONE WAS SLAIN.
LORD MARYELL! THEY'RE FADING AWAY INTO SMOKE!
AYE! CREATURES OF THE VELANKE'EN — ONCE ALL ARE DEAD THE ILLUSION OF SOLIDITY IS DISSOLVED.

EVER THE LECTURER, EH, MARYELL? I BID YOU ALL WELCOME TO HALYIR, IN THE NAME OF QILAAN — LORDS OF THE TEN PLANES.

IT WAS THE VELANKE'EN — THE STRANGE OVERLORD OF THE SHADOW-KEEP, AND MASTER OF POTENT MAGICS.


BOTH ETERNALS STRUCK IN UNISON — BUT THEIR BLOWS SIMPLY BOUNCED OFF AN INVISIBLE SHIELD.
YOU SHOULD BOTH KNOW BETTER THAN THIS! EVERY QILAAN STRONGHOLD HAS A CENTRAL POWER-SOURCE, AND ALWAYS EMBODIED AS A LIVING THING — THE VELANKE'EN! I AM THE MIGHT OF THE QILAAN MADE FLESH!

THE VELANKE'EN SPREAD ITS ARMS — AND A VERY UNIVERSE GLEAMED WITHIN ITS BODY.
BEHOLD! HOW MAY EVEN ETERNALS PREVAIL AGAINST SUCH AS THIS? I CONTAIN THE WHOLE OF THIS DIMENSION WITHIN MYSELF!
IMPRESSIVE TRICKS, QILAAN-SPAWN — IF YOU SEEK TO IMPRESS THE MORTALS, BUT WE KNOW YOU ARE OLD AND FADING.

YOU KNOW THIS SWORD, CREATURE? ONE OF THE SIX BLADES OF FATE. AND YOU KNOW THE POWER OF THIS STAFF!

MYRDAN SUDDENLY LUNGED AT THE STRANGE FIGURE.
THE BLACK SWORD BREACHED THE VELANKE'EN'S SHIELD, CUTTING DEEPLY INTO ITS UNNATURAL BODY. AS HE THRUST THE STAFF INTO THE RENT, IT WAS AS THOUGH AN ENTIRE UNIVERSE EXPLODED.

THERE! OUR GATEWAY INTO IAGON'S WORLD — AND THE HEART OF RIYALH!
WHERE THE VELANKE'EN HAD STOOD NOW BLAZED A DAZZLING TUNNEL OF LIGHT — A PATHWAY THROUGH THE DIMENSIONS.
HURRIEDLY, THEY PASSED THROUGH THE GATEWAY — AND EMERGED IN THE CENTRE OF A DAZZLING DISPLAY OF RAW POWER.
MYRDAN — THE VELANKE'EN! YOU DIDN'T DESTROY IT!
MAGICIAN — I BEGIN TO THINK IF I SURVIVE TODAY WITH MY SANITY INTACT I SHALL BE A LUCKY MAN!
THE QILAAN ARE AN ARROGANT RACE, MAJESTY, AND THEY LIKE TO DISPLAY THEIR WEALTH. AND TO SOME, THIS IS A TREASURE INDEED.
NAY, MAJESTY, EACH QILAAN FORTRESS HAS ONE, AND THIS IS THE VELANKE'EN OF RIYALH ITSELF.

AYE — AND EASILY DESTROYED BEFORE IT CAN GROW MORE POWERFUL.
AS THE CREATURE DIED, THE BLINDING LIGHTS DIMMED AND FADED ALTOGETHER.
AS DARKNESS FELL, THE TOWERING FIGURES OF THE QILAAN ENTERED THE CHAMBER.
SO — ONCE AGAIN MYRDAN AND MARYELL WORLD-BREAKER ARE OUR GUESTS. PERHAPS THIS TIME YOU WOULD CARE TO STAY LONGER!
ONCE BEFORE YOU BOASTED THAT, MARYELL, BUT COULD ONLY BANISH US TO LIMBO AND SEAL OUR EXIT.
I WILL NOT AGAIN MAKE THE ERROR OF BEING MERCIFUL, ACHIOR! ONLY YOUR DESTRUCTION WILL SUFFICE.
AYE — BUT TODAY WE HAVE THE RUNESTAFF OF URYELL SILVER-ARM AGAINST WHICH NOT EVEN THE GODS WOULD STRIVE. THE REIGN OF THE QILAAN ENDS HERE!

UNITED BY THE STAFF INTO ONE MAGICAL BEING, MYRDAN AND MARYELL FLEW AT THE QILAAN — WHO CONJURED THEIR OWN SORCEROUS WEAPONS FROM THE AIR ITSELF.

AH! FOES WORTHY OF OUR STEEL AT LAST! ALLIES OF THE QILAAN FROM THESE TEN PLANES, NO DOUBT.

THEIR ANGER AND OUTRAGE FINDING RELEASE AT LAST, IAGON AND SALADOTH CUT INTO THE ALIEN HORDE.
LIKE FOR LIKE, THE ANCIENT WISDOM SAYS. BUT FOR MY EYE I'LL HAVE YOUR BLOOD!

THE NUMBERS LESSEN, SALADOTH! I THINK WE MAY YET LIVE!
AYE, PRAISE THE GODS. BUT WHAT . . . ?

. . . SALADOTH SAW A SIGHT NOT MEANT FOR MORTAL EYES.
FREEDOM! BUT YOU'RE SUDDENLY QUIET, SALADOTH — WHAT DID YOU SEE BACK THERE?
NOTHING, MY LIEGE. AT LEAST, NOTHING I'LL REMEMBER DURING MY WAKING HOURS!

THEY TOPPED A GRASSY RISE, AND PAUSED TO LOOK BACK AT THE NIGHTMARISH SHAPE OF RIYALH — WHERE STRANGE LIGHTS BLAZED.

THEY'LL DESTROY THE KEEP IN THEIR BATTLE!

PERHAPS, MY LIEGE — BUT PRAY THE QILAAN FALL WITH IT, WHATEVER ELSE THE OUTCOME!

AND THEN, THE QILAAN KEEP ERUPTED IN A FRIGHTENING EXPLOSION THAT TORE HOLES THROUGH THE TEN PLANES.

IT'S OVER THEN! NOTHING COULD HAVE LIVED THROUGH THAT!
WRONG, MORTAL KING!

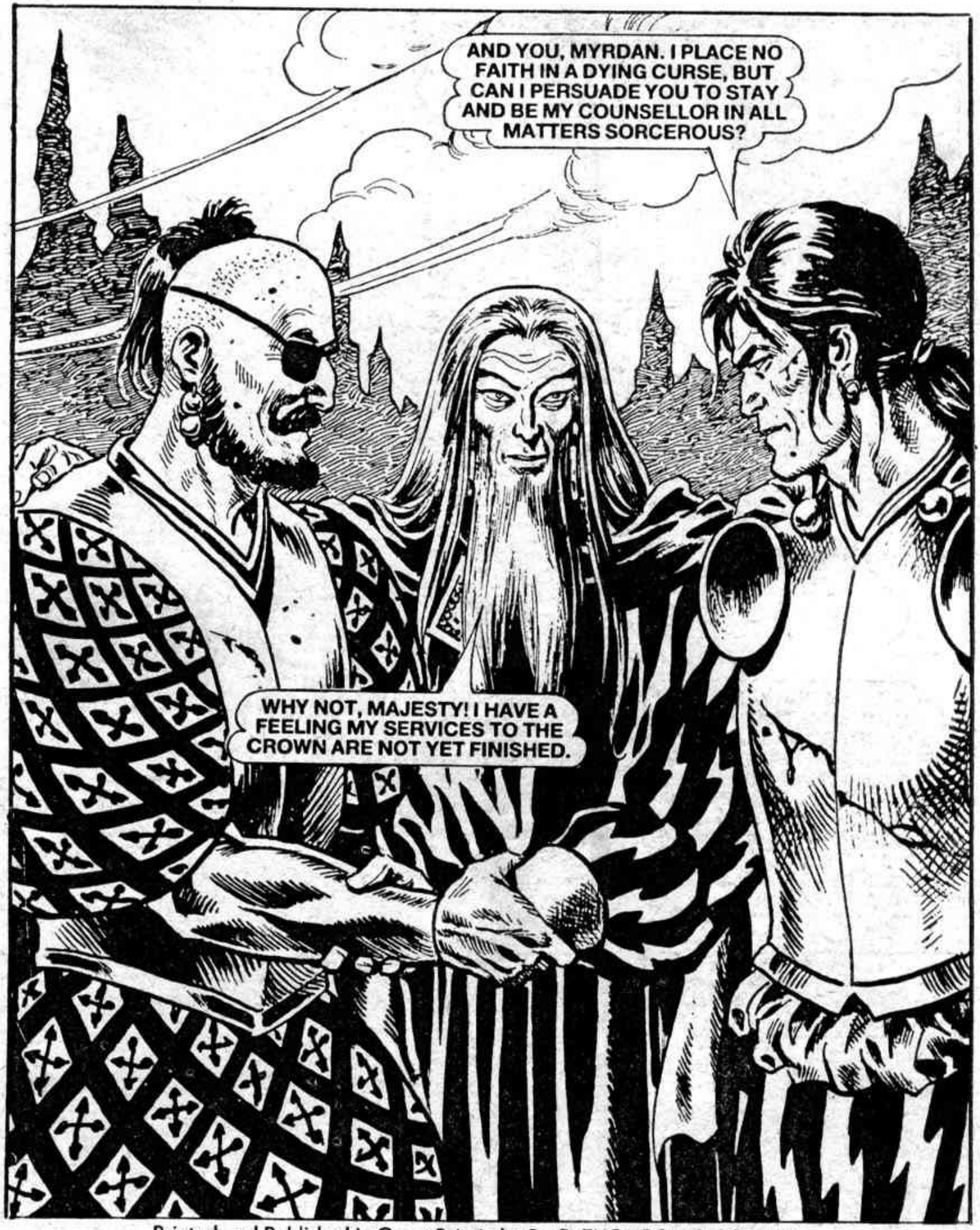
HIS BODY BATTERED AND TWISTED, ACHIOR STOOD ABOVE THEM, HIS FACE FILLED WITH LOATHING.
I LIVE STILL! I LAY MY CURSE ON YOU, MORTAL — MAY YOU NEVER KNOW REST FROM THE POWERS OF DARKNESS — AND THE BLACK ARTS YOU SO DESPISE!

TAKE YOUR CURSES TO THE PIT, DEMON-SPAWN! AND MAY CHA'ITAN WELCOME YOUR SOUL!
WEAKENED, ACHIOR WAS UNABLE TO STOP THE SWORD STROKE, AND DIED INSTANTLY.

NOW IT IS ENDED, MY LIEGE.
AYE, SALADOTH. AND ANGLERRE HAS MUCH TO DO. MANY WOUNDS OF ITS OWN TO HEAL.
BEHIND THEM, THE WEARY MAGICIAN APPROACHED UNSEEN.

MYRDAN! YOU LIVE!
AYE, MAJESTY. THE LIFE OF AN ETERNAL IS NOT SO EASILY SNUFFED. MARYELL HAS RETURNED TO BAROFONN, BEARING URYELL'S STAFF, AND THE QILAAN ARE DESTROYED FOREVER. MUCH OF OUR THANKS MUST GO TO YOU TWO.

SALADOTH, MUST YOU RETURN TO ABARIA?
NO, MY LIEGE. IT WILL BE AN HONOUR TO PLACE MY SWORD EVER AT YOUR DISPOSAL!



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